

The Non-implementation of Western Assistance Programmes: The Advisor's Point of View

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Abstract

In the transition process, many 'experts' from international organisations and Western countries came to CEE countries to advise them how to become EU members and to improve their situation. Despite the spread of such experts and the costs involved, little is known until now about the substance of their advice, nor of the extent to which such advice had an effect, that is, was implemented. This chapter addresses this issue. It starts by summarising the literature about the desired substance of advice. The empirical part is based on interviews with western advisors.

Introduction

During the transition from socialism to a market economy many donors, experts, advisors and consultants from international organisations and Western countries came to Central and Eastern Europe to enable the post-socialist countries to become EU members, to advise them on policy issues and to help them improve their situation. Much of that advice, however, fell flat. Sometimes the advice was out of politeness on the part of the local and national officials and was taken for granted. Sometimes it was merely rejected, but hardly ever was it implemented in the way designed by those advisors. In a previous publication (De Vries & Sobis, 2005) we argued that this could be due to a certain position taken by those advisors, namely that they acted as standard setters or fashion-setters (cf. Røvik, 1996; Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000; Sobis, 2002), not taking into account the specific circumstances and characteristics of CEE countries, which were very different from those in the home-countries of the experts and which could have prevented the implementation of standards based on the latter situation.

However, the outcomes of that research were mainly based on the opinions of the local officials in CEE countries. They especially criticised the US and French 'experts' for not listening, being arrogant and giving unrealistic advice.

That makes one wonder about the opinions of the advisors themselves. What is their opinion about their advice? Are they satisfied with the results of their work? What did they do to prepare themselves? What were their aims and objectives, and how did they try to achieve them? Did they do what advisors are expected to do in theory? What are they expected to do, anyway? And even if they conform to the requirements set out in theory, but the outcomes are still disappointing, do they, as one might expect, return the ball and blame the officials for not listening,

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being stubborn and stupid? Do they in general agree that a problem exists and where do they seek the causes thereof?

Their opinions and unexpected views about the real cause of the problems of the failing of such advisory projects have turned our investigation in a new direction. Before we present that conclusion, we will first give a concise overview of theoretical lines that might be interesting to take into account. Secondly, we present our data and methods. Next, we describe what we think is known until now about the role of foreign experts during the transition process. Subsequently, we will present the criteria against which to judge the actual role of these experts and finally we will present the preliminary outcomes of a survey among Swedish experts who advised CEE-countries during the transition-process.

Theoretical angles

Several theoretical angles might be interesting for doing research on the insufficient effects of policy advice. On the normative side, one can judge any seeking of advice as a development to be promoted. The more knowledge governments base their decisions on, the better the policies one might expect.

This is seen, for instance, in the classic works of Dror. In his classic work *Policy making under adversity* (1986) he recommends all kinds of institutional reforms related to the growth of expertise in government. He mentions, *policy planning and policy analysis units* near heads of government, as islands of professional excellence near main decision-making loci, temporary assigned people from within or outside government, having an academic background, knowledge of policy sciences, able to carry out evaluation studies in a professional way, investigating all the phases in the policy process, introducing heterodoxy, with the head of government as the client (Dror, 1986, p. 281). *Think tanks* for in-depth work on main policy and policy making issues constitute the second recommendation, which has to consist of high quality staff, creating doubt and questioning conventional wisdom, who are free in designing and evaluating options with direct channels to top-level decision making. Subsequently Dror proposes independent policy audit, cadre development and national policy colleges. These are all recommendations about institutions in which the role of intellectual challenges, knowledge, insight and learning are crucial in order to increase effectiveness of societal problem handling. In his eyes, the capacity to govern is mainly a matter of knowledge and experience, and if this is not available, one should look elsewhere. This is where the outside experts might come in. They are needed for the enhancement of mental-intellectual capacities in order to be able to make sound diagnoses, recognise tacit patterns, to enhance imagination, creativity and intuition (Dror, 1986, p. 122). Expertise could be of help in formulating an integrative policymaking philosophy, the debunking of policy orthodoxy, diagnostics, agenda setting, alternatives innovation, providing broad and long term perspectives, and techniques for handling complexity. In these processes, intellectuals and, especially, social scientists could play a significant role.

However, there are also other ideas about the role of knowledge. Some scholars argue that information is used only as a symbol and a signal that decisions are made as good decisions should be made (Feldman & March, 1981); others stress that it is not the lack of information that troubles the public sector, but the ambiguity involved in many problems (Feldman, 1989). That such information is not used i.e. does not result in implementation is, in this view, nothing to be worried about. It is not meant to be used. This angle is especially found in neo-institutional theory with regard to organisational changes and rational choice theories. Here, information gathering by government and also in the private sector is seen as something that has to be done, because one wants to create the image that one is a good decision maker. It is not the actual use of information, but the symbolic effect that is important. The informal rule is that a decision maker should be informed before making a decision and therefore, decision makers hire consultants and experts in order to give exactly this image. It is a communication device in order to get the things done, that one wants to get done. Expertise is needed to increase the number of arguments in order to get more support. The substance of reports is much less important, because these reports do not serve substantial goals but strategic goals. Reports are needed to pile up the desks and show anyone who objects that there is plenty of evidence to prove him wrong. It is not the logic of consequentiality that counts, but the logic of appropriateness. Advisors and consultants should help the interests of the policymaker in his function as a policymaker. They should not and probably will not, give advice that runs counter to those interests.

A downright critical approach is found in the organisation-theory point of view in which one looks upon experts, advisors and consultants as standard setters. When coming from western countries to CEE-countries, experts can be conceived as laying a blanket of western standards upon CEE-policies. The Western experts are not only the "outside experts" in the sense that they come from a consulting firm in the same country and try to provide public officials with advice. In CEE countries, they are really from the "outside", in the sense that they are "foreigners" in relation to another state, another social order, another culture with its cultural codes, understanding for moral, norms and values etc. In the – to them completely alien conditions – they try to provide public officials with advice, elementary know-how, pragmatic ideas and solutions to the problems of the post-socialist countries, that these experts imagine. This kind of advice would be visible in the increased organisational similarities in Europe and even in the world, through the spread of institutional standards and organisational fashions by *foreign experts*. Scandinavian researches (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Brunsson, Jacobsson et al., 2000; Røvik 2000) have focused on organisational changes and consequently, on policy-making processes through putting some emphasis on the more frequently role of multi-standard organisations and their representative experts for spreading "institutionalised standards" and "organisational fashions" that lead to organisational similarities. The Scandinavian studies emphasised the experiences of the Western highly developed countries. When reading these studies, one has the impression that the Western *expertise* ought to work correctly everywhere. However, the study

conducted by Sobis (2002) dealing with the Polish public employment service in transition during 1989-1998, has shown that the theories from the high-developed Western countries did not always fit the post-socialist countries that created a capitalist economic system without capital. This is an example that can serve the EU aid-programmes addressed to CEE countries in order to help them respect the EU norms in ten economic arenas and join the Community.

This approach is more critical, because some researchers (Wedel, 1998; Puhani, 1999; Sobis, 2002) show that foreign experts sent to CEE countries lacked the necessary imagination on the major problems that the post-socialist countries faced during transition and that the assistance programmes were far off the political, socio-economic and even cultural reality in these countries. Research in this area also showed that the Western theory propagated by the EU and ILO experts e.g. to create a market economy with a correctly working employment policy and the remedial measures to counteract increasing unemployment, did not solve the major problems in this arena within CEE countries. The actors from the macro, as well as from the micro levels, had to learn the new rules, procedures, routines and working methods to create the so-called modern public administration and modern organisations by a trial-and-error method. Not one institutional standard or organisational method could be implemented without the last say of the policy-makers and their understanding for the norms of rationality, financial possibilities and method. It is an understatement that one can conclude from such studies, that foreign experts did not contribute to problem solving as much they were expected to.

Hence, the research into the role of experts is not just one of explanation and description, but also one of normative judgement. The three theories are very different in this latter aspect. The first theory emphasises the need to add expertise into the public sector for substantial reasons. The second stresses that such expertise is not really needed, because it does not prevent decision makers from doing what they intended to do beforehand and such advice is only of strategic use. The third theory states that standard setting is the rule and that decision makers are subject to such outside experts because they are dependent on the outcomes of the process and the recipient could even be worse off because the standards do not fit the specific features of the context in hand.

One way to investigate the validity of these theories is to look at the behaviour of politicians and public administrators who are the recipients of such expertise. Many scholars have studied how the recipients of Western assistance perceive the donor organisations and their representatives, i.e. experts, advisors, consultants, and evaluators during transition (Wedel, 1998; Puhani 1999; Sobis, 2002; De Vries & Sobis, 2005). The outcomes of such research, however, vary in their corroboration of the theories. Were the recipients better off afterwards? Did they perform better or more similarly to comparable organisations in the West? Or were the foreign experts just telling them what they wanted to hear without subsequent results. Sometimes one gets this result and sometimes another.

A second angle that might shed some light on this problem is to ask the experts themselves. How did they behave? What did they do in order to prepare themselves for the job? What actions were undertaken? This is interesting, because if they intensively prepared themselves to the situation they were to be confronted with, the point made by Dror (1986) might be valid. In that case, expertise is meant to improve the situation and resolve the problems the recipients face. If, however, the experts prepared themselves by just looking at how to transfer their own standards to the recipient organisation, this is indicative of the critical point of view. In this case, expertise is not used in order to resolve the problems of the recipients' organisation, but to make the performance of that organisation more similar to that of similar organisations in the home country of the expert. And then, of course, experts can simply prepare themselves by asking what it is the recipient wants to hear and advise him accordingly. This would be indicative of the neo-institutional point of view.

Data and methods

This research is anchored in the previous research conducted by Sobis (2002) and de Vries and Sobis (2005). In this paper, we want to find criteria to judge experts' advice and to hear from the Swedish experts *how they experienced and perceived their participation in the assistance programmes addressed to the post-socialist countries, shortly after 1989?*

The research is based on document analysis and retrospective in-depth interviews with the Swedish experts working in Russia, the Baltic countries and other central and eastern European countries.

Regarding document analysis, we have collected documents, reports and manuals for trainers from the home pages of the European Union's assistance programme to Poland and Hungary: Action for the Restructuring of the Economy (PHARE programme), the European Federation of Management Consultancy Associations (FEACO), the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida) and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee) in order to describe, compare and summarise the literature about the desired substance of advice and what policy concerns experts, consultants and other trainers when giving advice to assistance recipients. We have also used some reports prepared by Sida – their evaluation of the assistance programme to Poland, Russia, and Latvia in the field of labour market reforms.

Concerning the Swedish experts, the aim was to interview in-depth the persons who were involved in various aid-programmes shortly after 1990. At the beginning of transition in CEE, there were about ten people in Sweden working as experts for CEE countries. Some of them were members of the Swedish Society for the Study of Russia, Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It is a forum for the exchange of information and ideas among specialists from a number of different fields such as political science, sociology, economics, geography, history and philology, but also translators, diplomats, journalists and teachers. The society

is politically independent. In the autumn of 2003, an open letter was sent to all members of society looking for potential respondents. Participation in the research was voluntary and it was extremely important to guarantee anonymity to the respondents. The duration of interviews varied from one to two hours.

This part of our research is far from representative for all Swedish experts, but the empirical material proved to be very rich, thanks to the respondents' engagement and good will to give us all the information about their first experiences from CEE during the period from 1989 to 2004.

The guide to the interviews was divided into four thematic blocks. The first block of the questions addressed to the respondents aimed to get elementary information about respondents and their formal education, actual professional specialisation, why they became experts involved in the assistance programmes to CEE and in which way. The second block focused on the very concrete assistance programmes, in which the respondents were involved and could describe the donor's organisation, the assistance recipient's organisation and their own role in the programme. In this block, some questions also concerned the main principles for financing the assistance projects decided by the donors and the respondents' private opinions about how the money should be matched to the assistance recipients. The third thematic block dealt with the respondents' concrete experiences when working in post-socialist countries. These questions were aimed at understanding the problems they faced and their working methods with the assistance recipients. Finally, some questions were addressed only to the respondents who were involved in the different assistance programmes many times. On the one hand, the aim was to confront the respondent's earlier experiences with his/her later experiences to see the differences in approaching the recipients' needs. On the other hand, the aim was to get to know something more about how the respondents perceived the increasing corruption when providing the assistance programmes to CEE, especially at the beginning of transition within the post-socialist countries.

Main criteria to provide the aid recipients with advice

At first sight, research into the practice of outside advisors seems to show little promise. This is the case because all aid-providing donor organisations have very strict rules and criteria to which advisory agencies and consultancy firms have to comply. Some examples may suffice to make this point. One might look, for instance, at the rules made by the European Federation of Management Consultancy Associations (FEACO), which is the umbrella organisation for 22 management Consultancies Associations. It covers 21 European countries and represents over 3,800 firms in Europe, with over 105,000 with a total turnover of about 18 billion Euros, equal to about 38 % of the total management consultancy market in these countries. The "Guidelines for Professional Conduct" of FEACO require member associations and their member firms to observe the following rules:

A consultancy shall at all times maintain the highest ethical standard in the professional work undertaken and in matters relating to a client's affairs, act

solely in the interests of the client. Where a consultancy is a subsidiary of a parent body, which is not in the public practice of management consultancy, all advice will be untied and independent of any influence of that parent body. It shall be regarded as unprofessional conduct for a consultancy:

Rule 1: To disclose or permit to be disclosed confidential information concerning the client's business and staff.

Rule 2: To accept work for which the consultancy is not qualified.

Rule 3: To enter into any arrangement which would detract from the objectivity and impartiality of the advice given to the client.

Rule 4: Not to agree with the client in advance on the terms of remuneration and the basis of calculation thereof.

Rule 5: To do anything likely to lower the status of Management Consultancy as a profession (FEACO, 2002).

FEACO requires each member of a National Association to confirm on an annual basis to its National Association that the staff of consultancy organisations adheres to the Guidelines of Professional Conduct. Any member who, in the opinion of its National Association's ruling body, fails to comply with the Guidelines of Professional Conduct is liable to suspension from membership of that Association and the privileges accorded to it by FEACO. Moreover, it is the duty of the National Association and the right of any member of that Association or aggrieved person to lay before the National Association's ruling body any facts indicating that a member has failed to observe the Rules laid down in the Guidelines of Professional Conduct.

One can also look at the requirements of national consultancy agencies, such as the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), which presents its international co-operation in the following way; "Sida is responsible for most of Sweden's contributions to international development co-operation" (Sida, 2004). The main goal is to improve the standard of living of poor people and, in the long term, to eradicate poverty. Sida is also responsible for co-operation with countries in Central and Eastern Europe to create stable democracies, efficient market economies and social welfare. As a government agency, Sida follows two annual directives and letters of appropriations from the Government and has to report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs about its activities. Sida has extensive ties with other Swedish government agencies. These can provide expertise in public administration that has developed over decades and centuries. Swedish agencies share their knowledge and experience in efficient administrative systems, information technology and leadership in areas such as taxation, audit, statistics and governance. Many Swedish counties and municipalities co-operate actively with the public sector of their counterparts abroad in twinning projects, especially in Central and Eastern Europe e.g. Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Co-operation with the future EU member states, the three Baltic countries and Poland is being gradually phased out: "The contributions vary depending on the requests and needs

of the countries. (...) The programmes of co-operation contribute to laying the foundation for normal neighbourly relations that can live on without government involvement” (Sida, 2004). They emphasise that Swedish trade and industry, municipalities, county councils, county administrative boards, government agencies and NGOs also play an important role in international co-operation. However, it seems that they do not co-operate with the Swedish trade and industry. Sida is supporting the long-term reform process almost entirely from funds coming from a special budget for Central and Eastern Europe and from the special Baltic Sea programmes. It can be seen that all kinds of ethical and professional standards are in place in order to prevent that the aid should be wasted money. Of course, this is a good practice.

In scholarly literature about how experts should behave, similar criteria are given. One could look for instance at Mirosław Grochowski and Michał Ben-Gera (2002) who wrote the manual: *How to be a better advisor*, in which they present basic rules for professional conduct and three models of advising.

They divide experts into two groups: advisors and consultants who almost possess the same set of basic skills, both are oriented to making a change by means of their products but some differences between them are clear. A consultant is a person who is in the consulting business and works for a consulting firm. “Working on an assignment, he/she is looking for opportunities for attracting new firms that will contribute to the growth and development of the consultant’s own business organisation” (Grochowski and Ben-Gera 2002, p. 11). An advisor, instead, does not work on a business basis. They may have another job without being paid. Advisors are not seen as “profit-driven people”; their work is more of a mission” (Grochowski and Ben-Gera 2002, p. 12).

Advising is seen as a way of professional development with room for the preparation of advice i.e. to formulate goals and objectives, measures, a timetable and budget. However, the advising project should also offer some learning opportunities. The aim is to provide policy-makers with the information they want. Advisors cannot forget that various individuals and groups make policies. The advice will be useful only if the advice is well defined, addresses the right people and is presented in a proper format to them (Grochowski and Ben-Gera 2002, p. 19). It should be emphasised that the outside advisors bring their knowledge and experiences concerning specific topics to a new environment with unknown codes of behaviour, rules and procedures: It is not possible to prepare valuable advice and send the advice to the right recipients, unless the advisor is familiar with what policy-making is and how policy is made in the real world. Advisors should be prepared to perform different roles and functions to achieve the goal provision to the client of timely, well justified, and appropriately presented advice (Grochowski and Ben-Gera 2002, p. 17).

Concerning the models of advice, Grochowski and Ben-Gera describe: 1) the expert model, 2) the doctor/patient model and 3) the co-operative model. In the first model, the client is expected to identify a problem, analyse it and articulate

it to the advisor. The last is called to find a solution to the problem. The model is used when the client does not have sufficient specialised knowledge about the issue, while the advisor is perceived as the expert in this organisational field. In the doctor/patient model, the advisor is expected to be able to identify the problem, to analyse it and to find the remedies to solve the problem. The co-operative model, as the name suggests, builds on co-operation between the advisor and the client when identifying the problem, analysing it and finding a solution to solve the problem. In the last model, the advisor, perceived as an outsider, is not expected to impose solutions: "The advisor plays the role of an expert and facilitator in the process of identifying the best solutions" (Grochowski and Ben-Gera, 2002, p. 23).

Each of these models has its advantages and disadvantages. This manual confirms that much has been done to improve international co-operation between advisors and clients. It is not surprising that other authors, dealing with the guidance for professional conduct, focus on more detailed aspects of advice. Ieva Lazareviciute (2003) focuses in another manual on six topics: 1) Beginning the training, 2) The policy process, 3) The product, 4) The client, 5) The advisor, and 6) Energisers. The publication should be treated as "a source of suggestions and ideas to the trainers" (Lazareviciute, 2003, p. 9). This manual provides a training framework that is completed with summarised key information, descriptions of practical exercises and notes for the trainers, as well as handouts that can be used in the training events. At the end of the manual, she includes a suggested training programme for a 3-5-day event.

In less recent, classic literature on the subject, similar criteria are formulated. One can refer to the classic books by Steele, (1975), Walton, (1969), Lindblom & Woodhouse, (1968), Block (1981), Argyris, (1999) and Schein, (1999). They point, among other things, to the requirement of sincerity; the different roles advisors can assume such as expert, partner or accomplice; the communicative; the necessary analytical and advisory skills and the need to make one's limitations explicit, as well as the limitations of the analysis. As Dunn (1994, p. 267) pointed out, the procedure of recommendation involves the transformation of information about policy futures into information about policy actions that will result in valued outcomes. He argues that such claims consist of actionable, prospective, value laden and ethically complex elements. According to him, advice is always about choices and the advisor should at least be able to identify the alternatives, make a decent impact assessment thereof and because of multiple advocacies, be skilled in the approach of triangulation. Failing advisory work can, according to him, be due to ignoring certain options, failing to communicate that decision-makers face unpopular options, bias and one-sidedness and uncritical behaviour on the part of the client or the advisor. (See also George, 1980, pp. 23-24).

Common to this literature is that three elements of advice stand out. First, advisory work should have added value to the client; second, such advice is always value-laden and full of ethical dilemmas and third, there should be mutual trust between client and advisor (Peterson, 1996; Peterson and Hicks, 1998). In our

case, for instance, trust is required between the aid-providing donor organisations and/or their representative, experts, consultants, advisors and evaluators, and the aid-recipients. If such trust is absent, the aid-recipients will not heed the foreign experts' advice. Hughes et al. (2002, p. 231) emphasise that "it is important that coaches also determine the level of mutual trust. They have to improve the relationship if necessary before targeting development needs or providing feedback and advice". *Trust* is thus an important concept for international co-operation when providing the Western aid-programme to CEE.

That such trust is not self-evident is argued by Wedel (1998) in her book *"Collisions and collusion: The strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe 1989-1998"*. She contends that during the first stage of international co-operation, in the framework of the aid-programmes, euphoria was seen in Central and Eastern Europe. The expectations were that the Western world would help them and would improve the situation. However, people realised very quickly, according to Wedel that the West either could not, or did not want, to really help them. The aid programmes did not take strategic issues into account in many cases and were not very helpful to the aid-recipients. She emphasises that the Central and East European expectations were, to a large extent, unrealistic. The same might be true for the other elements of sound advisory work. The next section presents a preliminary investigation among Swedish experts, consultants and evaluators and gives a startling account of what seemed to happen, in reality, when giving advice to transitional countries.

The advisory process from the point of view of Swedish experts

From the interviews with the Swedish experts working in Russia, the Baltic countries and other Central and Eastern European countries, it appears that they were involved in various aid-programmes shortly after 1990. Because of their earlier experiences in CEE, professional skills, language competence and abilities, their role in the aid-projects varied with the aid-donors' actual needs. Sometimes they were employed as experts having contact with Government officials in the aid-recipient countries. Sometimes they worked as consultants co-operating with regional and local officials and very concrete organisations. Sometimes, they conducted an evaluation of an aid-project. Most often, they were working at the aid-recipient office. At the beginning of transition in CEE, there were about ten people in Sweden working as experts for CEE countries.

They can be seen as the pioneers who had neither any practical experiences in conducting aid projects to the post-socialist countries, nor any guidelines for the professional conduct of such assistance. They had prepared a foundation for other experts who appeared in time and who could build on their work. The pioneer experts to CEE essentially contributed to the creation of the guidelines for the professional conduct of assistance. Some of them are still working in the countries waiting to join the European Union.

The Swedish experts' retrospective stories, dealing with their experiences from Central and Eastern Europe and their understanding of the situation, teach us a lot about the foreign experts' role in the decision-making processes there. Of course, we are aware of some dangers the retrospective interviews can cause for the interpretative work of that empirical material – the human memory can be deceptive, but we are also aware that these interviews constitute a unique source of information about the first aid-programmes to CEE, seen from their perspective. In that sense, they have not only historical value, but can also structure the more extensive interviews we are planning to carry out. The advantage of a retrospective interview is that the respondents are expected to have acquired the necessary distance to the events and their own role in the aid programmes. To protect them, we avoid a detailed presentation of the respondents.

The experts about themselves and their competencies

We were interested in what people, from the Western high-developed countries, became experts working in the framework of the Western aid programmes addressed to CEE countries after 1989. What knowledge and skills meant that their participation in these programmes was perceived as legitimate by the aid-donors to employ them? In other words, were the right people sent to CEE-countries?

From the interviews, it appears that after 1990, the international multi-standard organisations such as the OECD, EC, World Bank and IMF were looking for persons with special skills and especially various language competencies, to employ them in the Western aid-programmes addressed to Central and Eastern Europe. The aid-donors asked, among others, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs about assistance to find professionals who could participate in such programmes. The first aim was to describe the actual needs of the potential aid-recipients to base the many-sided assistance programmes on.

Since 1992, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with the Ministry of Finance, were involved in aid to Russia, the Baltic and other post-socialist countries. Swedish public officials were hunting for experts among university researchers and teachers through their private connections. They also advertised in newspapers, in order to recruit university graduates. But, as one of the respondents confessed: "the private canals became the most effective recruiting method to this job".

At the same time, another actor appeared on the assistance scene i.e., the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida) that aimed at assisting the neighbouring countries around the Baltic Sea and other post-socialist countries. They had their EU representative, who recommended some Swedish experts to participate in the EU aid-programmes to CEE.

The Swedish experts usually had a wide academic education in socio-economic and judicial issues. They can be divided into four groups:

1. Experts who had relations with public administration at the national and ministry level.

2. Experts, consultants and evaluators who co-operated with public officials and the concrete organisations at the sub-national, regional and local level.
3. Experts who also had relations with the public as well as the private sector and who were working at the various levels of the state organisation. They participated in various assistance programmes addressed to CEE countries
4. Consultants who only had relations with the private sector in CEE countries.

We have found two main explanations behind the respondents' answer to the question; *why did you become an expert involved in the aid-programmes to CEE countries?* Some of them thought they had the necessary professional skills and private connections to the former post-socialist countries through (e)migration, having family relations, a personal network and language competence. Other experts had a genuine interest, from their early youth, almost always in the Russia culture, literature and socio-economic aspects. Their admiration of Russian culture was the incitement to learn the Russian language and study Russian socio-economic issues that gave some outcomes in the form of networks there with researchers and some authorities. One of the respondents said; "In Sweden, people quite often combine various types of academic knowledge with a foreign language that provides them with special professional skills". Our respondents emphasised that their skills, language competence and social network proved very useful and was requested by the aid-donors:

I was asked to participate in the aid-programme. It was natural. I was working as a junior research fellow and was interested in labour market questions. I had a large network of people who were doing research on the Russian economy and the economy of other Eastern European countries. In this field I was out and about a great deal. There were always some relations with employers. Moreover, I have a good specialisation and there are only a few people in Sweden with these skills – two, in fact. Thus, I was given two consultant jobs in Russia through my connections. The language was very important then and was an absolute condition to participate in the aid-programme. I did not receive any training from the aid-donors. I went there just to see what aid-donors ought to do there. I did not prepare myself for this work. Twice I was sent out in this way; the first time in 1992 and the second time in 1996.

Or:

I had a good knowledge of Russia, especially about its public administration and economy. However, I was lacking information about Sweden in this regard. I had to study some questions from the Swedish perspective e.g. the legislative regulations dealing with value-added tax and tax-readjustment, but I had never been the sole expert there. I could always invite other Swedish experts to co-operate. They did not need to have any knowledge about Russia. In my job in Russia,

the most important thing was to understand the Russian legislative process and to find out what they really needed, what could be interesting for them and possibly borrow from the Swedish system. I simply translated the Russian question into the Swedish language in order to make the Swedish experts understand what they were expected to talk about.

If generalisation is possible, stories tell us that communication skills were the most important requirements for these early advisors. They were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the Russian language, their networks and interest in the field. Any preparation to do a good job, however, seems to have been lacking. It seems that the aid-donors took it for granted that the experts did not need any training to participate in the aid-programmes because their academic education and/or professional skills were in line with the donors' demands. Moreover, their language competence was a deciding factor in employing them at the beginning of transition in CEE. If this really is the case, one might question whether the right criteria were used to recruit the experts and whether they were indeed suited to the job to be done.

The Swedish experts about the aid-programmes, in which they were involved

We were interested in the *opinion of our respondents about the aid-programmes in which they were involved after 1990*. They made a clear distinction between the aid-programmes addressed to Russia and the aid-programmes addressed to other central and eastern European countries:

Russia was not expected to join the EU. It was the Russians who put together an agenda for assistance. They did not care about Western demands. They had no calendar to follow. The Russians had more interest in academic discussions to study the Western theory before decision-making so that they would know what was the most convenient for their actual situation (...) In fact, no one theory suited their needs; perhaps some parts of various theories proved useful. Thus, their situation as aid-recipients was not comparable with other post-socialist countries, which had to follow the EU plan of procedure.

The respondents were critical about the first assistance programmes sent by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to Russia. All those interviewed had previously been in Russia a couple of times, either when collecting empirical material for a research project or for some other reason. The exchange of knowledge between the Swedish and Russian scientists and in other networks proved to be an extra advantage to participate in the aid-projects for Russia some years later. When the respondents went to Russia again, they were in no doubt which people they wanted to meet, but sometimes did not have a clear idea on what they were to achieve:

It was very tough at the beginning. I was really angry. I had a boss in Stockholm while I was in Russia. There was very little understanding what we should be doing there. I had to ask my boss about everything. I was not prepared to carry out this project ... Then we had to fix computers and printers, i.e. the necessary equipment to communicate with Stockholm. We needed money, but our boss had not thought about that. We had to find a method whereby they could send us money each month. In the beginning, we covered the costs of the aid-project from our private cards. It was awful.

When I came to Moscow in 1996, the aid-branch was quite new. I had no expectations but I understood very quickly that it would be a long time before I could start the aid-project. Can you imagine, the great power asked about assistance! To win their trust was really a challenge for us.

The quotations above confirm that respondents had quite problematic experiences with regard to their participation in the aid-programme to Russia. For the first respondent, the working conditions proved extremely hard, simply because the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance were unprepared to carry out the aid-project at the beginning of assistance. The practical issues such as an office for the Swedish experts, accommodation and salary were already sorted out by the time the second respondent arrived. Thus, it was much more important for the second interviewee that there was a very limited time for carrying out the aid-project. The Swedish public authority simply was not sufficiently experienced in giving the aid-programmes.

A bitter critique concerned the EU aid-programmes that disposed of a huge aid-budget and were addressed to other post-socialist countries. In an official rhetoric, the aid-donors assured the aid-recipients that assistance ought to contribute to their adaptation process to a market economy and to approach EU demands. However, one of the respondents said:

In a capitalist economy, money is expected to make more money. If the EU had decided to invest in the post-socialist countries, then they knew very well what outcomes they expected to receive in return.

First, the EU had sent Western consultants who were expected to describe the needs of the aid-recipients. It was very quickly evident that the EU had very bad consultants at the beginning. In Russia, for example, some consultants had serious problems with the Taxation Authorities. The EU consultants also did not have sufficient knowledge about the country to which they were sent:

I have seen some students in this job. How could they describe a quite complicated issue without knowing anything about the country in which the project would be conducted? This job demanded specialisation in some research fields. The project was expected to give a positive impact on economic development.

Certainly, such unprepared policies had to have negative consequences for the implementation of the very concrete aid-projects. Moreover, the EU ignored the fact that the legislative changes, necessary for building a market economy, had not been carried out in the post-socialist countries in most socio-economic spheres:

A lot of assistance was conducted in a very naïve way. For example, they sent consultants without preparing institutional ground to carry out reforms. To change anything, you have to know what you are going to do. You need the legislative functions and you have to see if the laws have gone through Parliament. In practice, it is the only way that the law can work correctly. It is a political process. Legislation governs all activities. Laws cannot collide with the people who are in the system and with their mentality. If there are lacking certain elements in the system, you cannot expect to have any positive results from the aid-project.

In the opinion of the respondents, public officials from the post-socialist countries also proved to be unprepared to meet the Western consultants. They were lacking knowledge about what assistance they could obtain in practice from the aid-donors. They could receive only expertise, advice and training while most aid-recipients were only interested in receiving money or electronic equipment. The most frequent sentence the Swedish experts heard from the aid-recipients, was: "We only need equipment. If we had the money to buy computers, we could fix everything ourselves". In fact, they could not obtain money in cash. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank created a special loan with a low rate of interest for the aid-recipients for the purchase of computers, printers and faxes etc. The borrowed money was expected to be reimbursed to the aid-donors with a profit. Then, the EU promised to provide the aid-recipients with technical assistance to install the electronic equipment.

Another cause for the advice being inconsequential was that money had to be spent, no matter how. On average, the EU aid-projects assigned 200-300 million Euros to a country for a two-year-project in the organisational field. The aid-recipients' absorption was rather limited. Under no circumstances could they spend such a huge sum within two years. Thus, the Western consultants produced plenty of reports and written material that no one saw and for which the aid-donors had to pay a great deal: "*They produced more and more reports to spend money*". The aid-recipients were not amused by such EU aid-projects. Moreover, a respondent explained: "*To implement a project would take about two to three years. The bureaucratisation was enormous*".

It may be justified to conclude that the experts recognised the problem that their advice was not implemented and often went up in smoke. They blame this not on themselves, but on the problematic conditions they had to work in. No preparation, too much money with too little time to make something of the project, the different expectations on the side of the recipient and experts and no substantial commitment from the aid-providing donor organisations.

The situation changed somewhat for the better when the EU started co-operation with organisations specialised in giving assistance to the Third World. Sida was one of them. They essentially contributed to the implementation of the EU PHARE programme to CEE countries e.g. in the Labour Market and Labour Protection arena.

Sida's working principle has been to detach the same experts for many years in the aid-programme, addressed to the same aid-recipient. In this way, they tried to ensure continuity in giving assistance: *"they preserve the institutional memory"*. Poland is a good example, with regard to the aid-project dealing with the Labour market and Labour Protection arena. Sida asked the Swedish National Labour Market Administration (AMS) responsible for labour market issues to conduct an aid-project in Poland. The Employment Agency in Lodz very quickly became the model labour office and received the AMS assistance programme in 1993-94 (Sobis, 2002). AMS did not produce excellent documentation of the aid-project, but it was at least transparent how much money the aid-recipients received, how much money was spent and on what. One of the respondents was of the opinion that the consultants from AMS and Sida worked more effectively than the EU consultants. Moreover, Sida's projects were shorter, more flexible and demanded more discipline from the consultants in conducting the aid-projects.

Usually the organisations that wanted to conduct a project, initiated direct contact with the aid-recipients themselves. Thus, the Swedish AMS initiated the first contact with the Polish Labour Market Board to agree about the general conditions of the aid-programme. They were clear on what assistance they could provide the aid-recipients with. They also based their work on some principles in giving assistance. These involved that the recipient also had to contribute to the advice, thus making a commitment on the recipients' side. This could take the form of providing accommodation to the consultants or facilitating their travels in the country and guaranteeing that the Swedish consultants could meet Polish public officials, if necessary. If the aid-recipient accepted these conditions, the aid-project conductor (AMS) wrote a proposal and sent it to the aid-recipient to sign. After accepting the written version of the aid-project and signing it, Sida prepared a contract e.g. between AMS and the Employment Agency, for instance, the Labour Office in Lodz, to start the project. The aid-recipients knew exactly from the beginning what promises had been made, what means had been assigned and what assistance they could expect to receive. The Swedish consultant could not receive payment for her/his work without the signature of the aid-recipient on the invoice that confirmed the aid-recipient's acceptance of the reports and the documents written by the Swedish consultants. Through such incentives, the mutual co-operation between the aid-donors and the aid-recipients became transparent. It should be emphasised that Sida had no formal connections with the European Union. However, they applied to the EU for financial help and received money in the framework of the PHARE programme.

Since 1997, Sida has carried out an evaluation of all Swedish assistance programmes implemented in CEE countries within the labour market arena. That evaluation was conducted independently from the aid-projects and the evaluators were not involved in any of them. The Swedish evaluators began their work after the aid projects were completed. With regard to the Polish example, Sida asked the Polish Labour Market Board and the Swedish AMS about assistance in preparing the working conditions for the evaluators: *“AMS co-operated with many Employment Agencies in the region and they were always willing to help the evaluators”* explained one of the respondents. The aim of the evaluation was, on the one hand, to know if the aid-project would have to be continued in the future and what assistance would be necessary. On the other hand, the evaluators had to make sure that the aid-project was conducted in agreement with the plan of procedure and that the aid-recipients were pleased with the assistance provided to them.

The work of this organisation shows that it seems possible to get things implemented. They did not just provide money, but were themselves committed and asked the same commitment from the recipients. This supports the feeling that in order to get new policies implemented, one needs commitment on all sides, from the aid providing organisations, to the recipients and the experts.

The experts' understanding of their role for decision-making processes in CEE

Thirdly, we asked the respondents about *how they perceived their role in the aid-programmes to CEE*. The answer to this question is ambivalent. The respondents shared the opinion that they essentially contributed to speeding up the modernisation process in many public authorities. They contributed to making public officials understand how important it is to have modern working methods in many organisational fields. However, they were rather sceptical regarding their influence on problem-solving in the public administration of CEE countries that they have met during transition. Coming back again to the example of the labour market and labour protection reforms, the respondents were of the opinion that they did not contribute in decreasing the unemployment rate, which was the major social problem in the CEE countries:

We immediately saw – when we went to the Employment Agencies – the long corridors full of people taking their place in the long queue. What an idea to implement a “pilot” aid-project and create a model labour office, without any concrete purpose. It is impossible to continue such a job without having any influence on legislation. It is the most important issue that I tried to emphasise when meeting the public officials.

With time, I have learned to inform the aid-recipients what working methods would be useful to them and under what conditions. (...) You can influence the situation through social dialogue with employers, employees, the state and the Federation of Trade. They have to agree

concerning many aspects. It was difficult to explain to public officials that they have to co-operate together in creating new jobs and that they have to have a dialogue with workers and local authorities to improve the situation at hand. Some CEE countries were successful with the pilot aid-projects. They had clients among the public officials and they implemented the labour market remedial measures to combat unemployment and they developed training programmes. Then, you can have the feeling that you have influenced the decision-making process. They followed your advice.

The centralised power relations in most CEE countries were seen as a major obstacle to create such a social dialogue. Not only that, the money coming from the aid-programmes should be divided more rationally, in the opinion of the respondents:

First of all, the aid-donors ought to employ local experts in order to create an expert team for the aid-project. Local experts have the necessary knowledge about a country, they are highly motivated if they receive a salary and furthermore, they learn something new. This knowledge would remain in the aid-recipient's country and the local actors could create a balance between the foreign experts and the national decision-makers to work more effectively with the reforms.

You have to be very well anchored in local events. It is not sufficient to come here and tell your truth and your story. It is not enough to read the daily press concerning the issues to be able to give advice. It happened often that the Swedish experts or consultants did not understand the Russian order. Local knowledge and co-operation is necessary to find a piece of the puzzle that can be useful in the whole context of the new system. Many aspects that we have in Sweden can be totally uninteresting to Russia.

The respondents also expressed their concerns about the possible improvement of the Western assistance to CEE. For them, it was an important issue that the aid-donors ignored. Namely, that they did not create possibilities to a prolongation of aid-projects, due to the situation of the aid-recipient's country:

Sometimes we have a "crazy" short time to conduct an aid-project. You receive payment for one expert-day and have to accomplish all the expert-days. It demands extreme concentration. The EU aid-projects usually have a deadline for completion. It happens quite often that the project begins too late, but you still have to respect its deadline. It is absurd! You hardly have the time for the preparation phase of an EU aid-project.

Moreover, the respondents emphasised the lack of coordination of aid-programmes among the various aid-donors. The aid-providing organisations did not co-operate and were not working towards the same goal. For instance, the

Western experts expected to meet frequently at conferences, where they could exchange opinions and experiences as a necessary condition to the international coordination of the aid-programmes to CEE. In the respondents' opinion, not one of the aid-providing donor organisations kept free space and time for such activities. It seems that the international organisations did not recognise the need to orchestrate any form of "amalgamation of wishes". As one of the respondents told us about Sida:

I think that they sent many Western consultants to create good working labour markets and employment in Eastern Europe, but this is not sufficient. It is also advantageous for the West. You give money out but you create employment for your own people.

But these things do not only apply to international organisations. The Swedish Ministry of Finance had the same approach:

Most of the costs involved in the aid-project went to Western experts. In our project, that does not represent all the aid-programmes, we financed everything connected to our needs: the office in Moscow, Western consultants and training achievements. However, the Russians paid for their trips to Sweden.

These points result in the conclusion that maybe the experts and the recipients as actors were not causing the problem, but that the main cause has to be found within the aid-providing donor organisations. One question is whether they were really aiming at getting things changed and new policies implemented in CEE-countries. It seems that it can also be argued that these organisations were mainly interested in running their own internal organisational affairs with departments trying to secure their own position within the organisation. As organisations they were trying to secure their position in competition with other aid-providing donor organisations. And as money providers, they were not so much committed to improving the situation in CEE countries, but more to worrying about procedures to be followed properly, deadlines to be met, keeping projects within the budget constraints and probably (self-) employment.

Conclusions and reflections

The research question underlying this paper about the role and norms of international advisory work is what we should think about the role of expertise in the transition process and to present a (unfortunately still) preliminary analysis in order to find an explanation as to why so much advisory work fails to be implemented. First, we presented some theoretical lines that might be interesting to take into account. Secondly, we described what we think is known about the role of foreign experts during the transition process. Then we presented examples of criteria against which the actual role of experts might be judged and finally, we present the outcomes of a preliminary survey among the Swedish experts that advised CEE countries during the transition-process.

The investigation among the experienced Swedish advisors in the central and eastern European countries corroborates Wedel's (1998) observation. The findings show that talking to experts presents a more benevolent picture of their work than talking to the recipients. However, according to the theory on expertise, pilot research has shown that the foreign experts and consultants agreed that they were not always successful and also not always acting in conformity with the criteria. Good preparation, trust and commitment were missing in many advisory projects in CEE countries. The aid-recipients in many cases had reason to be disappointed with the Western aid-programmes to CEE. The respondents, especially those who conducted an evaluation of the aid-programmes, confirmed the cynic approach and pointed to the problems within aid-providing donor organisations who secured almost only Western interests when assisting CEE. It is important to note that it is not only the recipient organisations that are disappointed about western aid in the form of western expertise, but that the experts themselves are equally critical and also indirectly questioned the moral standards of Western assistance and the behaviour of Western experts. They emphasised that they frequently had to operate in situations which were characterised by ambiguity, ignorance, uncertainty and sensitivity in which it was impossible to apply ethical rules.

Although the experts seem to mainly put the blame for all this on the aid-providing donor organisations, one might also conclude that the experts themselves were violating the criteria, which says that one should not accept an advisory function if one does not feel competent. As we have seen, this incompetence was sometimes compensated by producing thick, but useless, reports and the experts did not object to the organisations using them as accomplices not for the benefit of the clients, but for the benefit of the donor organisations which were securing their own interests.

We have the impression that no guidelines for professional conduct of aid-projects can be successful, in practice, without also making significant structural changes within aid-programmes. The Swedish experts themselves thought they had only played a minor role between the powerful aid-providing donor organisations and the aid-recipients. The EU, Sida and even the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs or Finance employed them without giving them enough time for preparation and without any possibility to prolong the aid-project in the cases where it was necessary. This outcome suggests that a necessary angle to the problem could well be the role of these organisations, their motives and rationale and that more attention should be given to the ethics, trust and commitment issues of the aid providing donor organisations. More and more, we have the strong feeling that much advisory work from western consultants in CEE countries during the transition phase fell flat due to such reasons. Two sides, the recipients as we investigated before, and the experts, as investigated in this paper, agree on that. However, without carrying out an investigation among the aid providing donor organisations, we are still unable to pinpoint the problem to its real cause. That search continues and moves towards the aid-providing donor organisations.

On a final note, we do not imply that donors' or recipients' behaviour is to blame for the money wasted on advice that comes to nothing. Neither had any experience in the transition from a command economy to a market economy. They had to learn their new roles and strategic behaviour from the very first through "learning by doing". Even if the aid-donors' imaginations about assistance proved unrealistic and our respondents had a strong feeling that they were hindered in their contribution to the modernisation process of Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the later phases, the relations between aid-donors and aid-recipients showed an inclination to build long-term trust, commitment and mutual co-operation, which eventually turned into a partnership relationship some years later.

Despite all the problems, the "co-operation model of advising" was appreciated by the Swedish experts as the most effective assistance to CEE countries. The model not only demands foreign experts to be in the right place at the right time, but also to have an anchor in the local network and understanding for occurring processes. The problem was simply that the too restrictive boundary conditions under which they had to operate, hardly allowed for meeting these demands.

The positive aspect is that the respondents presented some pragmatic ideas on how to improve Western assistance to CEE. Being well prepared, creating commitment, seeking co-operation among aid-providing organisations, modesty as a basic attitude for experts, a good understanding of the specific national regulations, seeking collaboration with local experts, and not being tied to unrealistic deadlines, seem to be the major remedial measures for effective aid-projects. It would also be unfair not to see the positive outcomes in terms of the modernisation of CEE countries. The first steps on the way to integration and international co-operation in the framework of the EU have, despite all the problems mentioned, been taken.

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